



# AROUND NDE

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## Commissioner and Deputy Retire from NDE



Polly Feis & Doug Christensen

Nebraska's longest serving Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Education stepped down on July 15, 2008. A reception was held by NDE in their honor on June 27th.

The audience enjoyed a slide show of photos from the last 14 years along with a video of staff members sharing memorable moments.

In his final comments to staff, Doug told of how in high school he got the chance to play quarterback when the starter became injured. As he took the field, the coach told Doug, "This is your chance...When you get the ball in your hands, and you get the chance to run it, take it to a better place." Doug capitalized on that opportunity, and his team won 62-6.

The Commissioner then directed his comments to the staff, "Today, and for the rest of the year...the ball is in your hands. When you get the chance to get the ball in your hands, and it's your turn to run with it, you need to take it to a better place. (Continued on p. 2)

## New Commissioner Selected

Adhering to the timeline set in May, the State Board announced on September 22 that they had voted unanimously to extend an offer for the position of Commissioner of Education to Dr. Roger Breed, Superintendent of Elkhorn Public Schools. Breed has accepted the offer.

In May, the Board hired the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) to conduct a national search. NASBE conducted focus groups to get input on the qualifications and work experience that the new Commissioner should possess. The position was posted on July 1 and applications were accepted through August 15. Twelve applications were received.

The Board's search committee, which was comprised of Fred Meyer, Kandy Imes, Pat Timm, and Bob Evnen, reviewed all of the applications and conducted the first round of interviews on September 2nd.

Four finalists were interviewed by the entire Board on September 22. They were: Dr. Roger Breed, Supt. of Elkhorn Public Schools; Dr. Dan Hoelsing, Supt. of Coleridge, Wynot, Laurel-Concord and Newcastle Public (Continued on p. 4)



Dr. Roger Breed

## Commissioner & Deputy Retire

(Continued from page 1.)

I can think of no better thing to leave you with. It's what has defined my life. You can always find a way to make it better than before. So, the ball is in your hands. Take it to a better place."



Doug addresses NDE employees one last time while Polly looks on.

In her remarks to staff members, the Deputy Commissioner heaped accolades on the person she worked with side by side for over 14 years. "He stands up for what's right...People listen to him. I want you to know how special he is, and what he has done for education. I want you to recognize the man who has taken us to a place we have never been before. [He has] focused every one of our professional lives." Polly said she tries to convince her daughter to move back to Nebraska so that her grand daughter can benefit from Nebraska's quality K-12 education.



NDE employees at the farewell reception.

Doug and Polly were presented several gifts from staff. Each received a set of coasters featuring their pictures, and a Seiko watch.

Doug remarked, "This is better than a plaque... Every day that I put this on I will remember all of you and your generosity, courtesy and support — and all of the work that you did."



Doug and Polly unwrap their watches.

Polly also received a set of "walking sticks" and Doug received a Husker jacket, wall hanging, and cap.



An avid hiker, Polly explains the benefits of walking sticks.

"These things will cause us to remember all of the great people we have worked with, Doug commented.

Our thanks go to Doug and Polly for their leadership and dedication to NDE.



A die-hard Husker fan, Doug shows off his jacket.



## Farewell Photos



The Sentimental Journey Barbershop Quartet entertains the crowd. The quartet included Jim Eslinger, John Gill, Ed Shaw and Jerry Jordan.



The "NDE Singers" perform an original composition. Pictured l to r: Pam Tagart, Jeff Schneider (partially obscured), Carla Osberg, Eleanor Shirley-Kirkland, Sue Martin, Kay Bergquist, and Bob Lundberg.



One of Doug and Polly's Cakes

Frank Lloyd, administrator of Vocational Rehabilitation, shares his talents on the piano as employees arrive for the farewell.



Doug poses with his wife Cheryl after the program.



Doug and Polly enjoy a standing ovation.

## New Commissioner Selected (Continued from page 1.)

Schools; Dr. Virginia Moon, Supt. of Ralston Public Schools; and Dr. Larry Ramaekers, Supt. of Aurora Public Schools. In addition to the interview with the Board, the finalists spoke with and took questions from the Education Committee and a policy partner group that included NDE representatives. Finalists also had individual meetings with Governor Heineman. After hearing input from the other groups, the Board deliberated and then voted.

State Board President Fred Meyer said all of the finalists were well-qualified as education leaders and would have served Nebraska students well. "We are pleased to announced that we have asked Roger to take this key leadership role and are confident that his long-term tenure as a Nebraska school superintendent is evidence of the leadership skills and experience needed to succeed in this position. Nebraska public education is at a critical point in its history. Members of the State Board of Education have the highest confidence in Dr. Breed's ability to face these challenges and to lead our schools. His communication skills are strong and his experience working with the Governor and Legislature on education issues will be an asset to all public and private school students."

### Supervisor/Manager of the Year



Supervisor/Manager of the Year, **Donlynn Rice**, Senior Administrator, Curriculum, Instruction and Innovation. Pictured l to r: Doug Christensen, Donlynn Rice, Pat Rice, Eric Rice and Polly Feis.

### Supervisor/Manager of the Year Runner-Up



Supervisor/Manager of the Year Runner-up, **Marilyn Peterson**, Federal Programs. Pictured l to r: Doug Christensen, Marilyn Peterson and Polly Feis.

### Employee of the Year



Employee of the Year, **Susan Dahm**, Program Associate IV, Early Childhood. Pictured l to r: Doug Christensen, Susan Dahm, John Dahm and Polly Feis.

### Employee of the Year Runner-Up



Employee of the Year Runner-up, **Harlan Feather**, Administrative Support Services. Pictured l to r: Doug Christensen, Harlan Feather and Polly Feis.



## DDS Golf Event Raises \$7100.00 for Relay For Life

For the third year in a row, the DDS staff worked with co-worker Tracy Harnly's "Team Perseverance" to raise money to fight cancer by hosting a golf tournament. Harnly was diagnosed in March 2005 with Stage IV Breast Cancer. This year's tournament surpassed all other years, raising \$7100.00 to be donated to the American Cancer Society (ACS). The event was organized by DDS staffers Tracy Harnly, Paul Absalon, Chris Dooley and Julie Kokrda.



Tracy Harnly addresses the crowd at the golf tournament. Pictured l to r: Chad Larson, Julie Kokrda, Tracy Harnly and Paul Absalon.

Sixty-six golfers participated in the event this year, along with an additional twenty-five who came for a fun-filled dinner and raffle drawing that took place after the golfing concluded. Tracy, who has been designated by the American Cancer Society as a "Hero of Hope" for the Great Plains Region, took time during dinner to share her story of diagnosis, treatment and survivorship.

This year, Tracy's Relay for Life team set a fundraising goal of \$35,000. She and her team co-captains (pictured at right) pledged to shave their heads if they did not meet their fundraising goal. Thanks in part to a \$10,000 donation from the Lincoln Wal-Mart stores, Tracy's team raised an amazing \$50,306 for the ACS, thus sparing Harnly's and her co-captains' hair.

Harnly commented before the golf event, "This March I celebrated three years of cancer survivorship! Without the ACS sponsored research that lead to the creation of Herceptin, a chemotherapy-like drug that I receive via IV every three weeks, I would not be here to help put on this event. Every time I see my sons play baseball or when I kiss them goodnight, I am reminded of how much I owe to the ACS!"



**Team Perseverance**

Pictured l or r: Michelle Boden, co-captain; Tracy Harnly, Captain; and Lori Borer, co-captain.



Harnly is overcome with emotion as she accepts a \$10,000 check from Lincoln Wal-Mart stores.

*Congratulations to the Tracy and the DDS staff for another successful fundraising event!*

## NEW EMPLOYEES

*Welcome Back!*



**Kathy Boshart**, IT Applications Developer Senior, Data Services and Federal Programs Team, 6/24/08



**Dennis McGuire**, Education Specialist IV, School Improvement: Accreditation, 7/1/08



**Brent Gaswick**, Program Specialist III, Educational Technology, Curriculum, Instruction & Innovation, 7/7/08



**Randy McIntyre**, Education Specialist II, Data Services & Federal Programs, 7/28/08



**Edward Foy**, Education Specialist III, Statewide Assessment, 8/1/08



**Amy Spellman**, Administrative Specialist II, Human Resources, 8/1/08

Photos are not available for the following new employees:

**Suzanne Skaff**, VR Service Specialist, Downtown Omaha VR Office, 7/1/08.

**Kristina Berst**, Program Specialist I, West Omaha VR Office, 8/1/08.

**Elizabeth Loza-Garay-Roll**, IT Applications Developer, West Omaha VR Office, 7/1/08.

**Randy Coleman**, VR Service Specialist, Downtown Omaha VR Office, 8/1/08.

**Leslie Novacek**, Administrator, Assistive Technology Project, 7/14/08.

**Lindsay Bletscher**, VR Service Specialist, West Omaha VR Office, 8/29/08.

**Laurie Eichthaler**, VR Associate, Lincoln VR Office, 7/28/08.



## NEW EMPLOYEES



**Sue Bainter,**  
Education Specialist II,  
Early Childhood,  
8/4/08



**Gayle Grauer,**  
Program Specialist II,  
Curriculum, Instruction &  
Innovation, 9/1/08



**Michele Blodgett, DDS**  
Adjudicator Trainee, Disability  
Determinations Services,  
9/4/08



**Terri Chmelka, DDS**  
Adjudicator Trainee, Disability  
Determinations Services,  
9/4/08



**Gloria Friesell, DDS**  
Adjudicator Trainee, Disability  
Determinations Services,  
9/4/08



**Brad Kastl, DDS**  
Adjudicator Trainee, Disability  
Determinations Services,  
9/4/08



**Anne Paulsen, DDS**  
Adjudicator Trainee, Disability  
Determinations Services,  
9/4/08



**Heather Richey,**  
Office Associate III  
Office of Equity & Instructional  
Strategies, 9/23/08



## Rice Recognized by NEOPA

Donlynn Rice, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Innovation, has won the Nebraska Educational Office Professionals Association (NEOPA) 'Educational Administrator of the Year' award. This award will be presented at NEOPA's fall workshop on October 17, 2008 in Wayne, Nebraska at Wayne State College.

Each local association, like NDEOPA (Nebraska Department of Education Office Professionals Association) in Nebraska, is eligible to nominate a supervisor or administrator from their workplace for this statewide award. Lora Sygal, along with some of Donlynn's staff, worked on the nomination.



Donlynn Rice

Donlynn's nomination will be forwarded to the National Association of Educational Office Professionals (NAEOP) and represent Nebraska at the national level. The national award is presented at the NAEOP national conference in July.

In recognition of her award, Donlynn will receive a plaque, a one-year membership in NEOPA, and a \$100 monetary award. Congratulations!

## Kirby Recognized for Volunteerism

Peg Kirby, office associate on the Equity and Instructional Strategies Team, recently received the Presidential Gold Award for Volunteerism. Kirby was cited for:



Peg Kirby

- Writing a grant application to Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, which resulted in a \$5,000 grant to train 65 Boy Scouts to become Certified Emergency Responders within a sixteen county region;
- Numerous civic presentations on home emergency preparedness;
- Preparing volunteers to look like disaster victims for numerous disaster drills in the surrounding area;
- Being a member of the Disaster Volunteer Education and the Medical Reserve group;
- Presenting and training citizens to be Emergency Volunteer Center workers to serve during a disaster;
- Studying and receiving certifications from the National Emergency Management Association; and
- Volunteering regularly to assist with Lincoln's Star City Holiday Parade.

In recognition of her service, Peg received a lapel pin and a certificate from President Bush. Congratulations, Peg. We're proud of you!



## Politics in the Workplace



It is important during this election year that all employees be sensitive and respectful to those around them when discussing political issues at work. We want to respect fellow

co-workers' right to free speech but also remain sensitive to the issues that might arise during political debate. These types of conversations can sometimes be distracting or might create an uncomfortable work environment for those working around you. It is best to hold these discussions during your break or lunch time away from your work area.

In addition, employees who wear campaign buttons or shirts, or who pass out campaign literature during work hours are in violation of the National Labor Relations Act. The

NLRA, section 7, states that it is an unfair labor practice for employees "to interfere with, restrain, or coerce employees in the exercise of rights guaranteed." Therefore, the act of wearing a **political** button is considered a form of solicitation since it can be construed as an attempt to "coerce" fellow employees to vote for a particular candidate. This includes displaying campaign posters in individual work areas if these areas are in view of others.

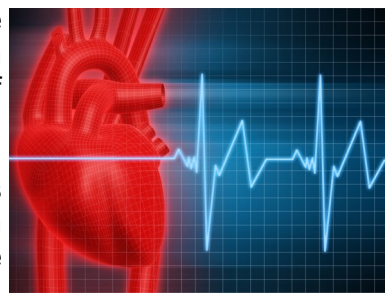
We would also like to take this opportunity to remind everyone of *NDE Personnel Rule 004, Chapter 15, Political Activities:*

*Unless specifically restricted by federal or state law, employees may participate in political activities except during office hours or when otherwise engaged in the performance of their official duties. Employees may not, however, participate in political activity using their status as a state employee to influence others.*

## AEDs Installed in NSOB-Lincoln

Sudden cardiac arrest kills approximately 365,000 people in the U.S. each year. Many of those victims have no prior indication of heart disease, and the cardiac arrest is the first sign of trouble.

Over the summer, seven Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) were installed in the Nebraska State Office Building in Lincoln. They are located on each floor on the wall by the restrooms.



Training sessions were held at the end of July for NSOB occupants. If you are interested in learning how to operate an AED (it's really quite easy) but were unable to attend the training, please e-mail Amy Spellman at [amy.spellman@nebraska.gov](mailto:amy.spellman@nebraska.gov).



## Another Graduate

Congratulations to Don and Diane Crouch (VR) on the graduation of their daughter, Kristin. Kristin graduated this month from Southeast Community college with an Associate's degree in registered nursing.

## Vacation Carryover Policy & Procedures



Fiji, perhaps?

You are a hard-working bunch. However, some of you need to get some vacation time in before the end of the year, in order to avoid losing it (you could take that a couple of ways, couldn't you?)

"unforeseen work-related emergencies," the following criteria is used by the Deputy Commissioner to evaluate requests:

- ◆ Date of request – Requests must be made by the employee and approved by the supervisor/LC and Deputy Commissioner prior to the end of the calendar year
- ◆ History of previous requests – Have repeated requests been made?
- ◆ Number of carry-over hours requested
- ◆ Rationale for request – What reasons are provided; do they reflect a lack of planning on the employee's part? Is the work cited project-based, or is it of an on-going nature? Is there a definitive deadline for work that is approaching in the near term (e.g., January 31<sup>st</sup>)?
- ◆ Alternatives for delegating the work – To what extent can the work be delegated to another staff person if it is time sensitive or has a negative impact on other's work if not completed (e.g., highly integrated with other's work)?
- ◆ Evidence of planned vacation days – Did the employee schedule the vacation days, but then due to work demands, the employee worked anyway?
- ◆ Effect of using carry-over hours – Can the number of carryover hours requested be realistically used by June 30<sup>th</sup> without: (1) negatively affecting the work group/team/ Department; and (2) affecting the employee's ability to use their upcoming year's vacation allotment in a timely manner (i.e., that is not creating another buildup of hours)?
- ◆ Proposed usage of the carryover hours by month

### Monitoring Leave Balances

Employees need to plan for vacation leave usage so that a large balance doesn't remain at the end of the calendar year. Saving several weeks of leave to use in December, for example, may conflict with work responsibilities.

Employees bear primary responsibility for tracking their leave balances. Leave balances will be reported on paper pay stubs through the end of the year. After that, employees can monitor leave balances through Employee Self Service in NIS. Supervisors are also charged with monitoring leave balances. Monthly leave reports are sent to supervisors by e-mail after payroll posts, which is generally within the last week of the month. Remember, when checking these documents, the leave earned in a current month is not available until the first of the next month.

### Use or Lose

The maximum amount of vacation that may be carried over into the next calendar year is 280 hours. See page 11 for information on how to determine whether or not you have leave to [use or lose](#).

### Carryover Requests

Vacation carryover is intended only for unforeseen work-related emergencies. (See [Section 15.5D of the bargaining agreement](#) or [Ch. 9, Sec., 004.04 of the 2007 Personnel Rules](#) as applicable.) Failure to plan for vacation days throughout the year, or citing ongoing work requirements, are not valid reasons to request vacation carryover.

### Evaluation of Carryover Requests

In an effort to reduce the vacation carryover requests to those that meet the definition of

### Request Form

If you feel that you have a valid request, complete the [Vacation Carryover Request Form](#), print and sign it, and route it to your supervisor. It is recommended that you begin this process no later than December 1st.

Requests must be made, and all approvals granted, prior to December 31, 2008. Any requests initiated or received by the Deputy Commissioner after the end of the calendar year will not be honored.



## Calculating Vacation Leave Carryover

To determine whether or not you have leave to use or lose, use the [2008 Vacation/Sick Leave Tracking Form](#), or do the following:

- Step 1: Determine your current vacation balance shown on your September pay stub under "Vacation Taken/Available." The figure is listed under column titled "Current Amount."
- Step 2: Add earnings you will receive in October, November and December. The amount you earn each month is found in the row titled "Vacation Hours Earned."
- Step 3: Subtract any leave taken in September, as it is not recorded until October.
- Step 4: Subtract 280 hours. If you have a positive balance, that is the amount of leave you will have to use or lose before December 31, 2008



### EXAMPLE

Vacation Balance on September 30, 2008 pay stub	273.49
Vacation to be earned in Oct., Nov. & Dec. (16 per mo.)	+48.00
	321.49
Vacation used in October	- 8.00
	313.49
Maximum carryover	-280.00
Hours to use or lose before December 31, 2008	33.49

## Volunteer Emergency Responders Protection Act

A new state law recently went into effect, which provides for protections for employees who are qualified volunteer emergency responders *for fire departments*. While this new provision will affect few of our employees, we wanted to pass this information along as requested by State Personnel. In addition, it creates an opportunity to remind you that the bargaining agreement and Personnel Rules only provide for civil leave for employees who are certified volunteers with the American Red Cross. Paid leave is not provided for other volunteer efforts, such as assisting in the clean-up after a tornado.

[Click here for more information on LB 1096 \(2008\).](#)

## Open Enrollment for CY 2009

Open Enrollment for calendar year 2009 benefits will begin on October 20 at 7 a.m. and end on November 17 at 10 p.m. Watch your office mailbox for the *Options Newsletter*, which will be coming soon. You will also receive a hard copy of your current benefit elections, so you can use it to plan for the next calendar year.

Keep your NIS password up-to-date. **Don't wait until the open enrollment period begins!** If you need a new password, go to the NIS sign-on screen at <https://nis.ne.gov/> and click on "Forgot Password." Complete the request form. For security reasons, NIS sends the password to NDE HR and we forward it to you once we verify your DNA. Peter Gensheimer is now handling NIS Security, including passwords. He can be reached at (402) 471-2295 or [<peter.gensheimer@nebraska.gov>](mailto:peter.gensheimer@nebraska.gov).